



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 1, 2023

Amy Dowell, Executive Director

Co-Chairs McCrory and Currey, Vice Chairs Winfield and Leeper, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty and members of the Education Committee—thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of two important bills before you today. I am Amy Dowell, Executive Director of Education Reform Now CT (ERN CT).

S.B. NO. 1094 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF READING MODELS OR PROGRAMS

First and foremost, we wholeheartedly **support S.B. No 1094**, which seeks to improve upon the “Right to Read” legislation that ERN CT advanced in 2021—through a [coalition](#) of legislators, policy advocates, and thought leaders.

There is a correct method for teaching literacy—one that’s backed up by data proving that it works—and, unfortunately, most Connecticut school districts simply are not using it yet. Statewide, only 46.7% of all third graders are meeting or exceeding expectations on English Language Arts on the state’s standardized assessment, and the outcomes are even more stark when disaggregated by race.

Since an interdisciplinary body of research has told us for decades how to do better, there is no excuse for failing to adopt a research-based approach to literacy in every classroom. “Right to Read” has put us on that path.

We commend the State Department of Education for shepherding the implementation of this bill with transparency and deliberateness to date. The amount of work and leadership that the Commissioner and her team at the Department have devoted to this statewide literacy program has been a model for other states. We also want to acknowledge Senator Miller and the Chairs of the Education Committee for their long-term commitment to the success of Right to Read.

These efforts to implement Right to Read have been complex and multi-faceted, touching upon curricula, teacher preparation, professional development, resource allocation, state-level infrastructures, and public awareness on “the why.” These pieces must all be working in concert to see true progress for students. So while there is urgency to this work, it all takes time.

We know that many districts are making changes and have begun implementing the required state reading plan with enthusiasm, but some have been racing against deadlines and financial constraints. Working together to find a compromise in timing makes sense, and will yield the best results for students, teachers, and districts.

Educators want to get this right for their students, and they deserve the requisite time and resources to implement their plans properly. This bill would briefly postpone district-level implementation of state-approved early literacy curricula so that districts have the time they need to plan and pilot the state-approved curricula and receive appropriate training.

When you know better, you do better. That goes for teaching literacy, and it goes for implementing a policy solution in the most collaborative and effective manner possible.

Please support S.B. 1094 so that districts and educators have the time they need to be successful in embracing every student's Right to Read.

S.B. NO. 1096 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE CHARTER SCHOOL APPROVAL PROCESS

Last year, we were [vocal](#) about the need to rebalance the authorization process for public charter schools. This year, we **support S.B. 1096**, which would effectively streamline and depoliticize the process of school approvals.

The current authorization process requires coordination between three different entities—(1) the State Board of Education (SBE), (2) the Education and Appropriations Committees, and (3) the State Department of Education (SDE). It also requires four steps—(1) an application to the SBE, (2) a public hearing, solicitation of comments, and vote on an initial certificate, (3) submission of the initial certificate to the Education and Appropriations Committees, and (4) awarding of funding to the SDE, which provides grants to local and state charters.

This process, designed to ensure accountability for public charters, has become overly cumbersome and complicated—as well as ideological. It can too easily burden a community that needs a new school with bureaucratic hurdles and political impasses. It can also delay the opening of a state-approved school so significantly that communities are forced to make alternative plans for their students and assume additional costs.

S.B. 1096 would eliminate the process of pursuing an initial certificate of approval and create a grant account for the purpose of funding new charters. This will finally allow families and communities to have access to the schools they need in a timely fashion that is not mired in red tape.

At every level of leadership in Connecticut, we have vocal and powerful support for opening and sustaining high performing public charter schools. The standards for charter schools in Connecticut are some of the most rigorous and the waiting lists of parents wishing to send their children to them are long. For these reasons, the naysayers and critics seem more out of touch each year. This bill is a common sense approach to meeting the needs of families and enhancing the quality of educational options in our state. We urge you to support S.B. 1096.



About Education Reform Now CT

The state chapter of a national organization and affiliate of DFER CT, Education Reform Now CT is a 501(c)(3) that operates as a think tank and policy advocate, promoting great educational opportunities and achievement for all by increasing equity, protecting civil rights, and strengthening the social safety net.